

PREFACE

The Coordination and Support Action in Marine Biotechnology (CSA MarineBiotech), is a collaborative network funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme. It consists of 11 partners from 9 countries that support marine biotechnology research and development in Europe. Since October 2011, the partners of the CSA MarineBiotech, with support from a growing number of associated stakeholders, have worked intensively to explore the opportunities and needs for European coordination, trans-national cooperation and joint activities in the area of marine biotechnology research.

The CSA MarineBiotech is not without history and responds to coordination requirements identified during various earlier initiatives. In fact, interest in marine biotechnology from the scientific community, and to some extent from industry, has grown rapidly in the past decade owing to a recognition of the sheer scale of opportunity presented by the largely unexplored and immense biodiversity of our seas and oceans and the need to meet growing demands for food and energy that cannot be satisfied from terrestrial sources alone. The marine environment accounts for over 90% of the biosphere and marine biotechnology is the key to unlocking the potential of the unique biodiversity of marine organisms and ecosystems.

Over the last decade, several science policy initiatives¹ have highlighted the importance of marine biotechnology and its potential to make a significant contribution to sustainable development on all fronts, including social, economic and environmental. However, these initiatives have also identified a number of important barriers and challenges that will need to be tackled at various levels for Europe to remain a key player in marine biotechnology research. To overcome the challenges in a coordinated way, scientists, policy makers and industry representatives have contributed to the formulation of a Vision and Strategy for marine biotechnology which is widely shared by the stakeholders² and provides key recommendations to improve collaboration and advance marine biotechnology research in Europe³.

It is only recently that a concerted effort has been initiated in Europe to take action on many of the issues identified, to improve the coordination of marine biotechnology research, raise its profile, and contribute to the establishment of the European BioEconomy. Notably, the FP7 CSA MarineBiotech has been preparing the grounds for a network of funding organisations and programme managers interested in joint support for marine biotechnology research that aims to launch in late 2013 (if awarded).

Hence, we are at a crucial time as we complete one major coordination effort to prepare for the next one. It is therefore very timely to take stock of the current situation and evaluate progress towards realising the vision and strategy for marine biotechnology in Europe and what challenges remain to position marine biotechnology as a key component of the European knowledge-based economy.

To this end, the final conference of the CSA MarineBiotech project brings together scientists, industry representatives, policy makers/advisors and other key stakeholders involved or interested in marine biotechnology research in Europe, to:

- Provide insights into some of the most important recent and ongoing marine biotechnology research, coordination and policy projects and initiatives, including the CSA MarineBiotech project, and look forward towards a future MarineBiotech ERA-NET;
- Discuss the status and recent progress of European marine biotechnology research efforts and capacity at various scales;
- Identify critical needs, gaps and challenges to inform future marine biotechnology policy and coordination efforts.

More information about the project, its activities and outputs are available from the CSA website at www.marinebiotech.eu

¹ Major marine biotechnology science policy initiatives and events include the 2006 Bremen Meeting, the 2010 Marine Board Working Group position paper on marine biotechnology, the European Commission Collaborative Working Group scoping paper on Marine Biotechnology and the EU-US Task Force on Biotechnology events.

² See Marine Biotechnology: a New Vision and Strategy for Europe, Marine Board Position Paper 15 available at www.marineboard.eu/publications

³ See www.marinebiotech.eu for recommendations from Stakeholders from two CSA MarineBiotech Workshops held in Portugal (Faro, 26-27 April 2012) and Germany (Hamburg, 8-9 October 2012).